

## Under the Microscope

### With Dr Conor Murray

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A trial that could lead to the earlier detection of lung cancers is being undertaken by RPH radiology consultant Dr Conor Murray.

Dr Murray and a team of RPH radiologists enlisted 80 smokers to be part of a trial that involved the volunteers having CT scans to detect nodules on their lungs.

Dr Murray said the use of a CT scan increased the detection of nodules, including cancers on lungs, when compared to conventional chest X-rays.

“With CT we can find nodules as small as 2mm in diameter, much smaller than would be detected by a chest X-ray,” he said.

He said studies done in North America showed that small nodules were detected in about half of the asymptomatic smokers scanned.

“It is our hypothesis that less than 20 per cent of Western Australia asymptomatic long-term smokers have these nodules, mainly because tuberculosis and fungal lung infections are not as prevalent in Western Australia,” he said.

“If we prove this it would mean that screening for lung cancer with CT for Western Australians may be much more useful than in North America.”

Dr Murray said if abnormalities were detected earlier there was also the likelihood that people could be treated earlier and therefore have a better chance of surviving lung cancer.

He said lung cancer was often diagnosed at advanced stages when it is incurable and has an average five-year survival rate of only 15 percent.

But with CT scans he said this survival rate would improve.

Dr Murray said research into lung cancer was vital because it was a bigger killer than breast, prostate and colon cancers.

“By comparison to research into these other cancers, lung cancer research can sometimes fall behind because there is a perception that it is primarily due to smoking and therefore self-inflicted,” he said.

The trial wrapped up in January and the findings will be published in a medical journal in the coming months.